

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE) · ALL CLASSES

Oideachas Reiligiúnach na Bun scoile

Religious Education in Irish Primary Schools

The Irish primary school system and religion

1

Patron bodies

Most Irish primary schools are under the patronage (management) of a religious body — the Catholic Church patrons approximately 89% of primary schools, Church of Ireland approximately 6%. Multi-denominational schools (Educate Together, Community National Schools) are growing.

2

Grow in Love (Fás le Grá)

The Catholic RE programme used in most Irish Catholic primary schools, introduced in 2015. Eight textbooks (Infants–6th class). Available in Irish and English.

3

Educate Together

A network of multi-denominational schools with an ethical-based Ethical Education programme rather than denominational RE. Growing rapidly — particularly popular with urban families seeking non-denominational education.

4

Community National Schools (CNS)

Multi-denominational schools under the patronage of the local ETB (Education and Training Board). Similar to Educate Together in philosophy. The fastest-growing school type in Ireland.

5

Learn Together

The Ethical Education curriculum used in Educate Together schools. Covers Ethics and the Environment, Belief Systems, Equality and Justice, and Emotional and Social Learning.



6

Withdrawals

Parents in all school types have the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction. Schools must accommodate this — usually during RE class, pupils may do a quiet alternative activity.

Changing Ireland

Diversity, respect, and sensitive

- Ireland has changed rapidly — approximately 20% of the population identify as non-Catholic (2022 Census), including a significant proportion with no religion.
- CLASS DIVERSITY: in many Dublin schools, a class may include Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, humanist, and non-religious pupils. RE must be taught with respect for all.
- THE LAW: the Education Act (1998) gives parents the right to enrol children without requiring participation in religious instruction. The right to withdraw is absolute.
- SENSITIVE APPROACH: in Catholic schools, you can teach the Catholic programme while being honest that other beliefs exist and deserve respect.
- MULTI-FAITH CONNECTIONS: many Catholic RE programmes now include material on other world religions. In Learn Together and CNS, multiple faiths are explored.
- AS GAEILGE: many Catholic schools teach some RE through Irish — linking language, culture, and faith. 'An Ghaeilge agus an creideamh' (Irish and faith) are historically intertwined.
- DISCUSSION: the question of whether state funding should continue for denominational schools is an active political debate in Ireland.

